

Going Beyond the Data in Diversifying the Teacher Workforce

By Saroja Warner

There is little doubt that increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the educator workforce is needed in Connecticut. Students of color represent 51.4% of the state's student body, yet only 1 in 10 teachers is an educator of color. Having a more diverse teaching corps matters. Teachers of color [positively impact the academic achievement of students of color](#), and all students benefit from having teachers who have diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Since 2019, the Region 2 Comprehensive Center (R2CC) and the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands (REL-NEI) have collaborated to support leaders at the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) in their efforts to improve the recruitment and retention of educators of color. CSDE's Chief Talent Officer, Shuana Tucker, Ph.D., shared that "Connecticut is committed to diversifying the educator pipeline." During the past two years we've launched several new statewide initiatives focused on expanding the education pathway from middle school to college and beyond. Guided by two essential documents, Connecticut has built the capacity of district leaders. The first is the state's [Guidebook for Hiring and Selection](#), developed by the Northeast Comprehensive Center, the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at AIR, and the CSDE. The second is a companion [Toolkit for District & School Leaders](#), written by the R2CC and the CSDE, which distills the lessons from a 12-district coaching pilot in 2020–21.

The R2CC's work with districts centers on technical assistance and uses the *Guidebook* and *Toolkit* to help district changemakers—often principals, school administrators, and human resources staff—learn how to recruit and hire more educators of color. The R2CC also helps them learn how to *sustain* these educators as professionals so that they remain in the classroom.

In all, the R2CC has supported 12 districts, representing approximately 85,000 students, in improving their hiring and selection processes. The R2CC staff, in collaboration with a team at the CSDE, trained the staff at Connecticut's Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) to do this work so more districts will benefit and is currently training district DEI directors so that increasing educator diversity is better positioned within district equity plans. This approach is in line with CSDE's goal of supporting local leaders in scaling up educator diversity efforts across the entire state.

Most school and district teams want a more diverse group of educators at the front of Connecticut's classrooms. They show this by a willingness to dive into data on school demographics, as well as data on hiring and retention of teachers of color. Teams scrutinize disproportionalities in data that illuminate the scope of the need for more teachers of color in their own district; they are eager to identify patterns and potential fixes.

However, it seems that state and district teams nationwide are less eager to engage in discussions about the root *causes* of these disparities in education—bias, privilege, and racism. One refrain often heard is, “What does any of this have to do with the data?”

Confronting bias, discrimination, and privilege is just as essential to diversifying the educator workforce as is examining hiring and retention data. By being clear about the systemic barriers facing educators of color, processes, policies, systems, and initiatives can be created that truly make Connecticut’s schools more inclusive and equitable. For example, discussing why only 5% of teacher of color candidates receive interviews, despite their representing 20% of total applicants. What conditions contribute to educators of color leaving the profession, and what do schools lose when they exit?

Scaling up programs and practices that foster educator diversity is essential. But if the bias-based beliefs and mindsets that created the current reality are not talked about, then how can the sought-after changes be achieved?

Connecticut has made noticeable progress since 2016. Then, teachers of color represented only 8.3% of the teaching force. Now that number is 10.6%, buoyed by the entrance of more than 1,900 qualified educators of color into Connecticut’s classrooms. The data show that this is the right path.

To continue toward the goal of diversifying the educator workforce, it is imperative that the experiences of teachers of color continue to be examined—and that those teachers can be candid about how the system has historically been biased against them—even if those conversations are uncomfortable.

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